

COVER STORY 38

The Phantom Menace



Future fashion — ready to wear.



STAR WARS

EPISODE 1:

THE PHANTOM MENACE

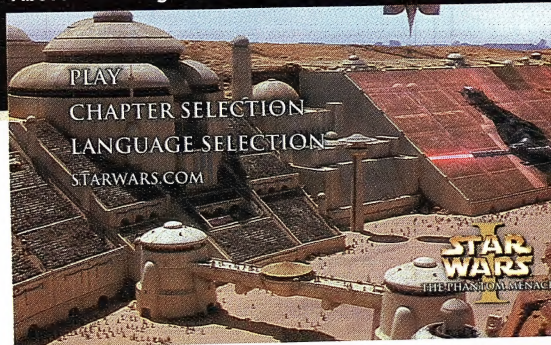
**THE SAGA
STARTS HERE**

We give you the full
run down on the
world's most eagerly
anticipated DVD.





Above: In waiting. Below: Feature menu.



■ USA ■ 1999 ■ MA

CAST

Liam Neeson, Ewan McGregor, Natalie Portman, Jake Lloyd, Ian McDiarmid

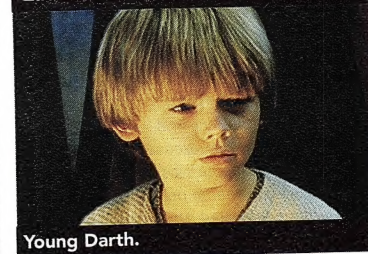
DIRECTOR	George Lucas
DISTRIBUTOR	20TH Cent. Fox
RUNNING TIME	133 Minutes
PICTURE FORMAT	2.35:1
AUDIO FORMAT	Dolby EX

The Story

After the Trade Federation attacks them, at the behest of the evil and mysterious Darth Sidious, Jedi Master Qui-Gon Jin (Liam Neeson) and his Padawan apprentice Obi-Wan Kenobi (Ewan McGregor) escape to the small planet of Naboo, where clumsy Gungan Jar Jar Binks (Ahmed Best) aids them in reaching Queen Amidala (Natalie Portman) to warn her of the Trade Federation's imminent invasion. Together the four of them escape Naboo, ending up on the desert



Queen Amidala.



Young Darth.

The Film

A notorious disappointment on release, made worse by the preceding frenzy of anticipation that surrounded it, *Star Wars Episode I: The Phantom Menace* is a triumph of style with none of the soul that made the original *Star Wars* great. Despite a fairly intricate web of characters and plot, thematically *The Phantom Menace* just isn't very

deep. The main reason for its failure is, as Lucas reiterates throughout the various extras on the disc, this is but the first part of a six part film. Unlike the first *Star Wars*, which is like three (or even six) films in one, *The Phantom Menace* is like a third of a film. All Lucas has really managed (or attempted) by the end of *Episode I* is to have introduced the characters and some potential plot strands - which is to say: not very much in two hours.

The other problem with the film is that, where Lucas seemed to have made *Star Wars* for teenagers, he made *The Phantom Menace* for little kids and the subsequent dumbing down of character and narrative is as insulting to *Star Wars* fans as it is to ten year olds.

But the film looks kickass. All the time, money and technical wizardry that went into the production is gloriously apparent in almost every frame. The artwork created for the film, especially the architectural artwork, is breathtaking in its beauty and scope. Lucas really has fused the cyber and real worlds in his film with more finesse and panache than has yet been achieved in cinema. And he's complemented it with some of the best sound-editing you're likely to hear and a truly majestic score from the maestro John Williams.

As far as characters are concerned, though they might be shal-

low they're damned goodlooking. In particular Queen Amidala has more costume changes than a fashion show and Darth Maul, with his dynamic appearance and undeniable athleticism and grace with a lightsabre, leads to some of the most exciting sequences in the film.

The DVD

When it comes to picture quality, once again Lucas has made everyone wait with bated breath only to disappoint with the end product. The lushness of the film, with its computer-generated beauty and emphasis on design and style has not been done full justice by the transfer. There's occasionally very obvious edge enhancement and a higher level of grain and artefacts than you would expect.

Where this disc does not disappoint is in the sound transfer. Nominated for an Oscar, the sound effects and effects editing is phenomenal, and the transfer is reference-quality.

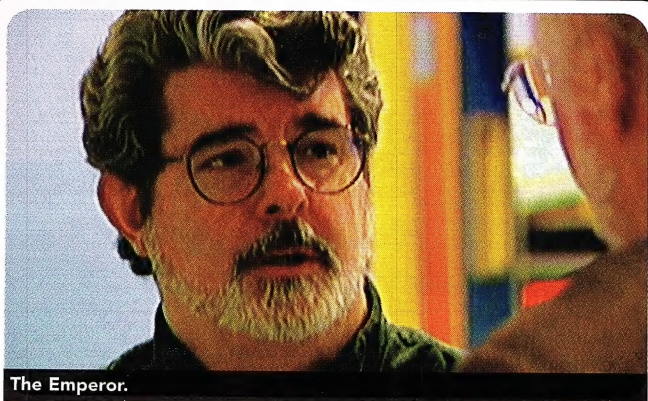
THE FILM ★★★★★
THE DVD ★★★★★

THE EXTRAS...



With recent reports that DVD enthusiasts are going to have to wait (probably) until 2005 before they see Star Wars episodes IV-VI cruising into the digital realm, you'd want the Episode I disc to be packed with extras - and it is.

There's a plethora of extras going into the minutest detail of every aspect of the film. The overriding impression you get is of the immense artistic control Lucas maintains over every aspect of his franchise.



The Emperor.



AUDIO COMMENTARY

With George Lucas, Rick McCallum (Producer), Ben Burtt (Editor/Sound Designer), Rob Coleman (Animation Director: ILM), John Knoll (Visual Effects Supervisor), Dennis Muren (Visual Effects Supervisor) and Scott Squires (Visual Effects Supervisor).

Lucas and McCallum give general overviews compared to the more specific and in-depth commentary provided by the other four contributors. The inclusion of three Visual Effects Supervisors is in no way overkill given that almost every frame has at least some CGI of some description or another - if not the annoying Jar Jar Binks than it's blue screen out a window. You get some sense of this fact very early on in the commentaries when producer Rick McCallum actually goes out of

his way to point out one of the few shot that DOESN'T include CGI. The effects work put into this film is absolutely phenomenal and thus far unparalleled and this becomes very apparent after having listened to the commentaries.

It's also a treat to hear Lucas speak so candidly about the ideas and themes that have informed (and continue to inform) his creation of the *Star Wars* galaxies and mythologies. He constantly eludes to the fact that the film is only one part of "a six part movie", often falling back on the "you'll understand exactly what's going on after this new trilogy is completed" - while remaining tantalizingly tightlipped about what the future developments might be.

His commentary reassures you that, however slight and faulted the narrative of *Episode I* might be, the larger saga Lucas is toiling to complete is well worth the wait.



TRAILERS & TV SPOTS

Trailers

+TEASER TRAILER

Easily the best of the trailers, this one begins by implying the modern myth-making aspect of the Star Wars films

and then moves on to focus on the young Anakin as The Chosen One, setting him up for the dark destiny we all know awaits him. It features many of the best shots of the film, promising a lot more



Getting fitted up.

than was eventually delivered.

+THEATRICAL TRAILER

Ablly showcasing the kickass sound and art design of the film, this trailer focuses on the "political" aspect of Queen Amidala's plight. A much more honest suggestion of what the film had to offer.

+“DUEL OF THE FATES” - Music Video

Featuring John Williams conducting an orchestra and chorus intercut with scenes, lines and backstage footage from the film, this is a musical montage of what the following featurettes have to offer, comprised of bits and pieces of all of them.

TV Spots

+TONE POEMS:

“One Love”, “One Dream”, “One Destiny”, “One Will”, “One Truth”.

A series of “poems”, each one delivered by the character it relates to. A fairly florid piece of propaganda expounding emotional and thematic depth the film doesn't even begin to approach.

+ADVENTURE:

“The Saga Begins”, “All Over Again”.

Relatively unthemed short montages of bits of the film.

DELETED SCENES & DOCUMENTARIES

+“THE BEGINNING” - Making Episode I

This is an extremely comprehensive documentary that covers almost every conceivable aspect of the making of *The Phantom Menace*. It begins with Lucas wandering up to his study explaining that today he sits down to begin working on *Episode I* of his Magnum Opus. It then moves through the various aspects of the film's creation dealing with each as they come into the production process in roughly chronological order, counting down the months towards the May 1999 opening. It's a very well constructed documentary, featuring loads of behind the scenes footage and cast and crew interviews.

You really feel the anguish and frustration Producer Rick McCallum goes through when he drives out to the Tatooine set in the Tunisian Desert to witness the devastation a massive storm has wreaked. It blew away months of hard work representing millions of dollars.

There's also a wonderful moment (shot at dusk and horribly dark so you can barely see anything) where Lucas shows his pal Steven Spielberg around the sets, taking him to a full scale model of a battle

droid and explaining the set up with the droid army and the Gungan battle. Spielberg reaches up to touch the mock-droid and manages to rip its arm off, embarrassedly trying to reattach it before telling Lucas he thinks the film's going to be “great, just great.”

The documentary ends with Lucas back in his study, pencil in hand, writing in his same yellow notebook: “Star Wars Episode II”.

+DELETED SCENES DOCUMENTARY

With his overpowering need to innovate when faced with any new technology, George Lucas has not disappointed with the DVD format. He decided that it would be cool to actually finish the animation from scenes that had been cut and feature those sequences as part of the DVD. This short documentary was included to accompany those sequences. Lucas has assembled his co-workers and pals - such as directors Francis Ford Coppola (*Apocalypse Now*) and Philip Kaufman (*Quills*) and editors Paul Martin Smith (*Ep. II*), Ben Burtt (*Ep. I*) and Walter March (*Apocalypse Now*) - to throw in their two cents worth on the art of editing. After these initial (mostly enlightening) comments, Lucas introduces the various sequences, explaining why they were cut. Following the sequences are explanations of how they were created. The amount of complex work that went into creating the waterfall scene (especially given it was all done just for the DVD) is astounding.

+DELETED SCENES

• “Complete Podrace Grid Sequence”

This is the expanded version of the lead up to the podrace, as the various alien competitors ready their craft and greet the crowd. The different creatures are all interesting to behold and the expansiveness of the arena is breathtaking. But you can see why it was so cut down, it does nothing to advance the story and is really just an excuse for animator/Star Wars buffs to “expand the universe”.

• “Extended Podrace Lap Two”

This sequence expands on the second lap of the podrace and as Lucas admits it's really just an excuse for him to “show off”. The podrace was one of the first ideas Lucas came up with and set to getting animated. He's clearly enamoured with his creation, both in terms of



Stating the obvious

Here's just a few of the deleted scenes



1 A pod of engineers



4 Coruscant expanded



2 Avoiding even more dangers



5 Anakin and Padme chat.



3 Escaping the waterfall



6 A young Greedo



7 See ya Jira

technical proficiency and dynamic action.

• "The Waterfall Sequence"

After their perilous journey through the centre of Naboo - from the Gungan's underwater city to the Royal city of Theed - Qui-Gon, Obi-Wan and Jar Jar Binks surface scant metres from a waterfall just as the motor on their submarine gives out. As the ship begins to get sucked over the edge, the two Jedi fire a cable into a nearby wall and climb to safety. Jar Jar hesitates then slips overboard just as the sub is sucked over to be smashed on the rocks below. Unfortunately the Gungan makes it to the safety of land.

• "The Air Taxi Sequence"

Once again: Lucas taking the chance to show off the wonders ILM are able to create. This time it's with the Capital "city-planet" of the Republic, Coruscant. The sprawling sun-drenched city-scape is seen from many different angles as Padme, Anakin and Jar Jar fly by taxi over the monumental buildings of the planet.

• "Dawn Before the Race"

After the stunning computer-generated spectacles of the last four deleted scenes the next two are positively mundane by comparison. Dawn before the race is a quiet moment between Padme and Anakin as the sun rises over Tatooine. Emotion, pffffff, who cares when there's a podrace to watch - not George Lucas.

• "Anakin's Scuffle With Greedo"

Anakin gets into a fight with a young Greedo (Greedo was the bounty hunter in the original Star Wars who was killed by Han Solo in the Cantina) after the green-skinned alien says Anakin cheated. Not very interesting at all, a poor attempt to establish Anakin's quick temper and a cheap attempt to link the two films.

• "Farewell to Jira"

This one's OK. Anakin says goodbye to Jira (the nice old lady he knows in Mos Espa) before he and Qui-Gon are followed by a "probe droid". The Jedi Master quickly turns around and slices it in half, then the camera pans up to an impressive CGI ship.

EASTER EGG #1:

On the second disc go into the Deleted Scenes Only menu. From the Complete Podrace Grid Sequence being highlighted press up until you've selected the Doc Menu, then press right to highlight the little box you can see. This will bring up a mini-featurette with Pablo Helman and Paul Griffin talking about their creation of the different podrace characters.

Repeating these steps with the Extended Podrace Lap Two highlighted will bring up Lucas discussing a POV shot from Jabba's perspective as he bites the head off a frog.

FEATURETTES, WEB DOCUMENTARIES AND STARWARS.COM

+FEATURETTES

These featurettes run about 8 minutes each covering much of the same ground featured in the main documentary, but going into much more detail. There's some recycled footage but mostly new interviews.

+VISUAL EFFECTS

This delves into the workings of ILM, interviewing the company's main players and walking you through many of the key sequences.

+COSTUMES

Again, design being the main force behind The Phantom Menace, the amount of quality work (and money) that went into this aspect of the film is phenomenal. There are a lot more interviews with the main cast. You also see the ini-

tial costume designs and have the difficulty of bringing these outlandish designs to life impressed upon you.

+DESIGN

Focussing on interviews with Design Director Doug Chiang, this featurette shows you the initial designs and their evolution into the ships, buildings and creatures that ended up in the final film. The overriding feeling you get is that Lucas is one hell of a taskmaster when it comes to design.

+FIGHTS

The most exciting and dynamic of the featurettes, this one gives you a lot more footage of the fight training - which is almost as good to watch as what you get in the film. Lucas explains the background to the Sith and Stunt Coordinator Nick Gillard explains the genesis of the Jedi fighting style.

+STORY

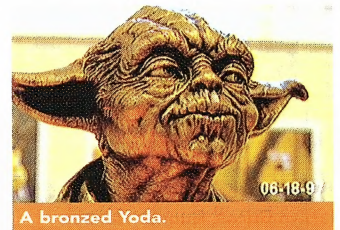
This featurette is fairly uninteresting. There's a lot of repetition of film and doco footage and stockstandard "actors talk about their character" stuff, which is never very interesting.

WEB DOCUMENTARIES

These are (approx) 5 minute documentaries originally created to air on starwars.com while the film was in production in order to give the fans a "fly on the wall" view of the making of the film.

STARWARS.COM

Access to an exclusive Episode I website with special features available only in conjunction with the DVD -TIM LEE



A bronzed Yoda.

EASTER EGG #2: On the first disc, go to the Language Selection menu. Highlight the THX logo and key in the code 11 3 8 (referring to Lucas' first film THX 1138). This will give you access to a hilarious DVD credits role with outtakes from the Phantom Menace.

ANIMATICS AND STILL GALLERIES



These are fairly interesting from a technical point of view. After the initial short explanation you can choose, by pressing the "Angle" button on your remote, between four viewpoints for the two featured sequences: 1) initial storyboard art; 2) rough animatics; 3) the finished sequence; or 4) all three together.

Introduction to Animatics Producer Rick McCallum explains what animatics are and how they have evolved to take the place

of storyboards.

Podrace Lap One Animatics

The animatic for this sequence was put together by Co-Editor Ben Burtt using computer-generated animatics, a Sebulba

hand puppet, temporary footage of his son filling in as Anakin and rough footage from the film.

Submarine Sequence Animatics

In April 97 Lucas had three no-name actors



"There's always a bigger fish."

step in to play Jar Jar, Qui-Gon and Obi-Wan and created a rough test of this sequence to help in the development of Episode I. It's rough, but amazingly similar to the final footage.

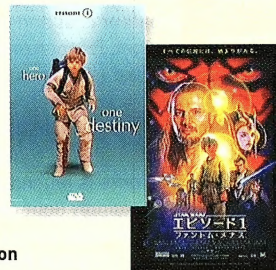
Exclusive Production Photos:

Behind the scenes photos with captions.

Print Campaign

Various of the posters used in the "One" concept campaign for the film.

Posters: Basically the official poster for the film repeated with "The Phantom Menace" printed in different languages.



"Star Wars Starfighter: The Making of a Game"

A short documentary (dare we say "ad") for the "Star Wars Starfighter" Playstation 2 game. That's Lucas for you - nothing if not cross-promotional.

The Trade Federation has nothing on Star Wars merchandising.

